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(54) **CABLE STRUCTURES WITH LOCALIZED FOAM STRAIN RELIEFS AND SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR MAKING THE SAME**

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H01B 3/00 (2006.01)
H04R 1/10 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***H01B 3/004*** (2013.01); ***H04R 1/1033*** (2013.01); *H04R 1/1016* (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

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USPC . 174/72 A, 76, 92, 84 C, 84 R, 74 R, 110 R, 174/113 R, 116, 110 F, 135, 99 R; 385/114, 385/100; 29/592, 592.1

See application file for complete search history.

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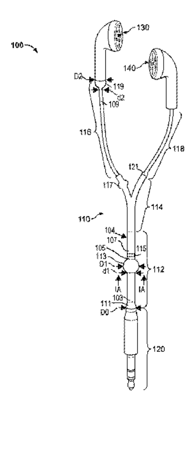
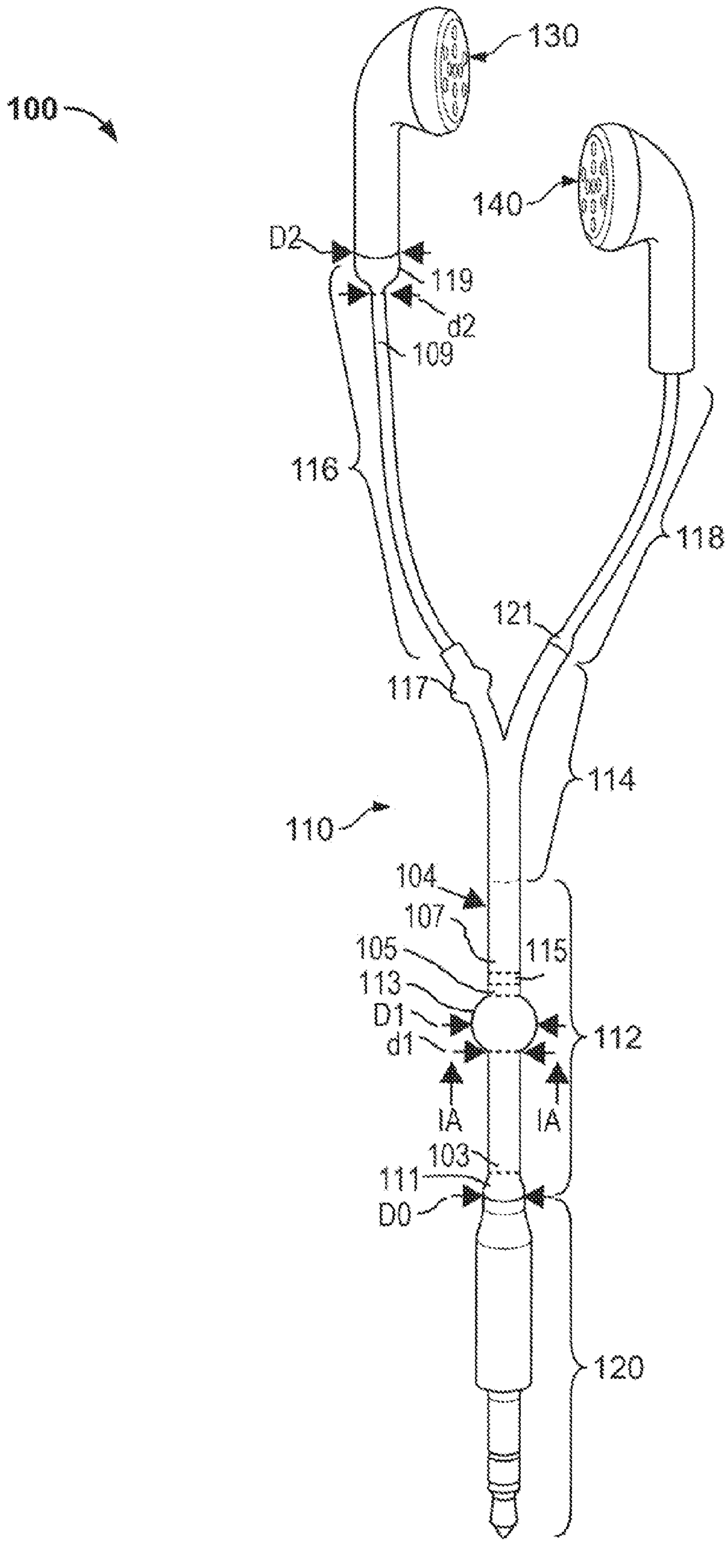
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Cable structures with localized foam strain reliefs and systems and methods for making the same are provided. In some embodiments, at least one localized foam strain relief may be incorporated into or positioned underneath a cover of a cable structure. For example, the ratio of base material to foam material may be varied during the manufacture of the cover, such that distinct portions of the cover may include more foam than other portions of the cover. This may provide localized strain relief properties to the cable structure while also obviating the need for additional strain relief components to be provided adjacent to or over specific portions of the cover.

27 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets





100
130
140
D2
119
d2
109
116
118
121
117
114
110
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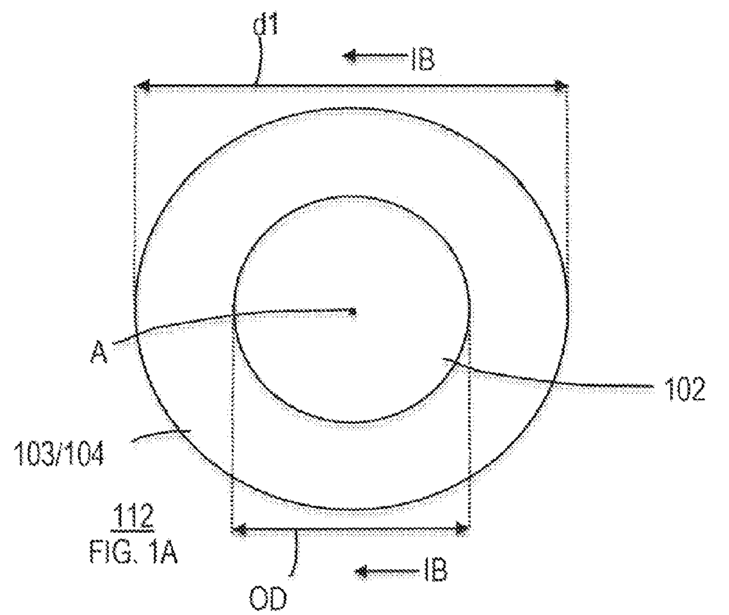
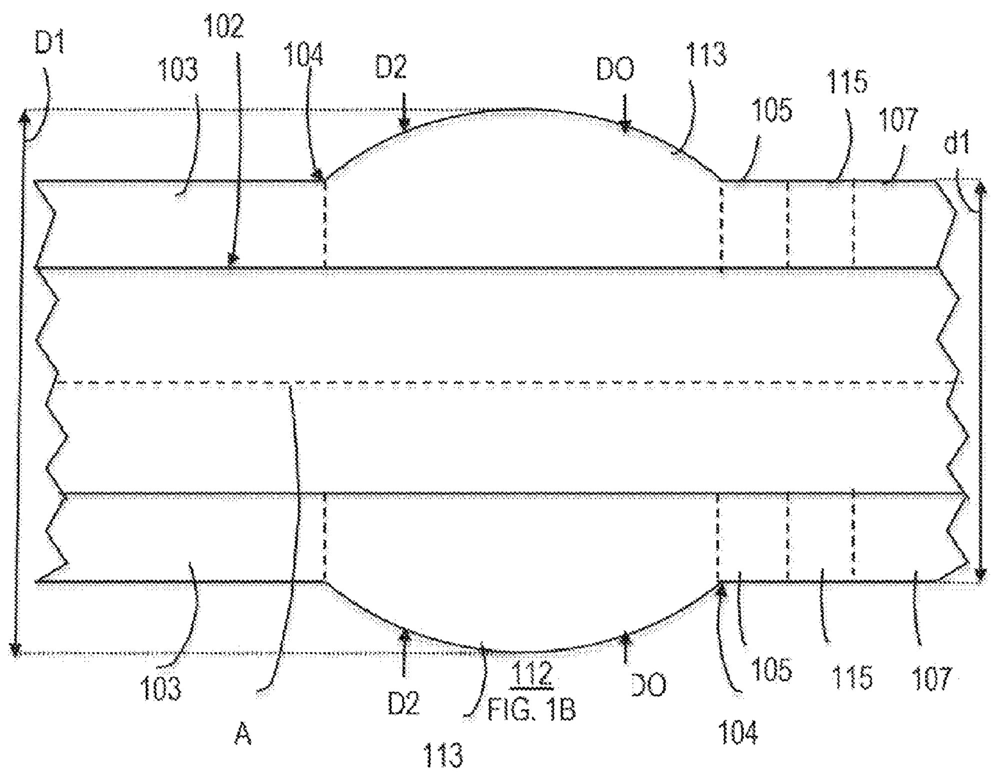
107
105
115
113
D1
d1
112
IA
IA
103
111
D0
120

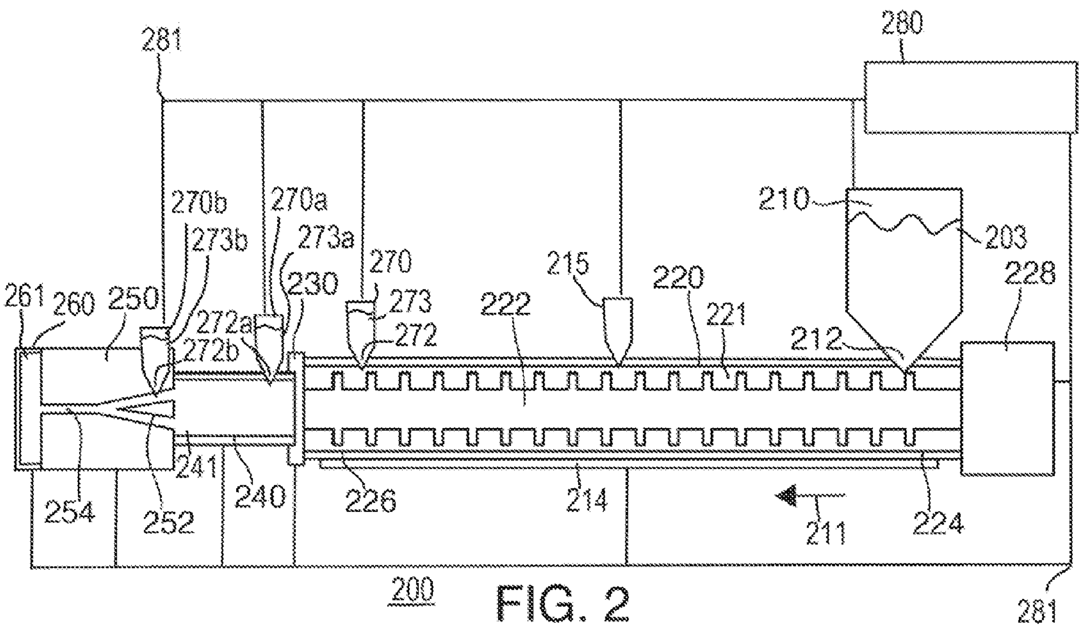
FIG. 1



112
FIG. 1A



112
FIG. 1B


280
281
270b
270a
273b
273a
210
203
270
230
273
215
220
228
261
260
250
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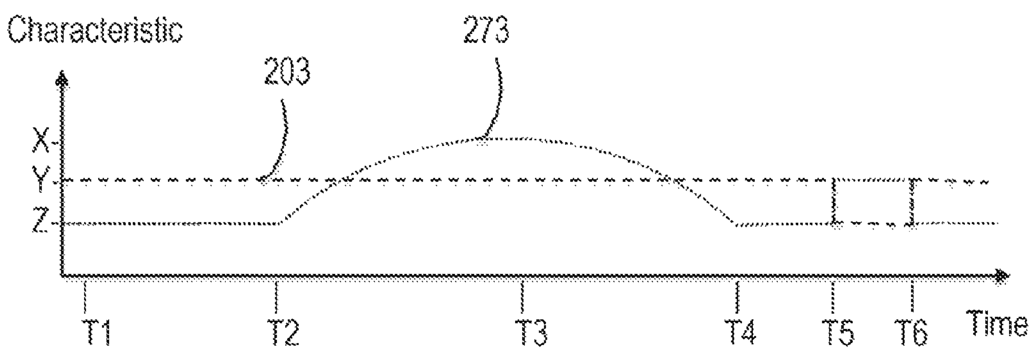
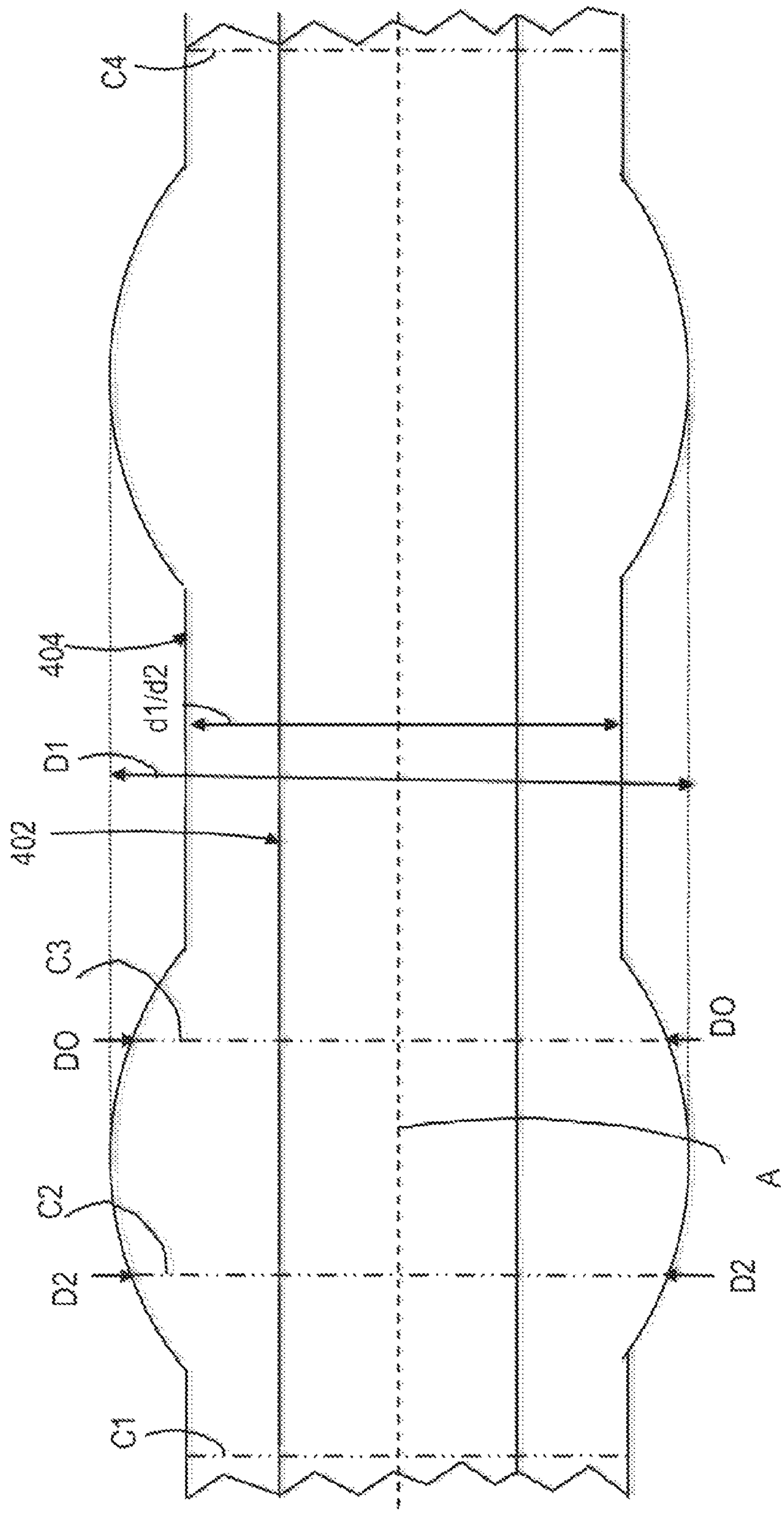
221
272b
272
212
241
254
252
240
226
214
224
211
281
200

FIG. 2



300
FIG. 3



400
FIG. 4


DISPOSING AN EXTRUDABLE MATERIAL INCLUDING A BASE MATERIAL AND A FOAM MATERIAL IN A PROCESSING SPACE OF A SYSTEM
502
EXTRUDING THE EXTRUDABLE MATERIAL THROUGH A DIE OF THE SYSTEM
504
DURING THE EXTRUDING, CHANGING A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BASE MATERIAL AND THE FOAM MATERIAL IN THE EXTRUDABLE MATERIAL
506

500
FIG. 5

CABLE STRUCTURES WITH LOCALIZED FOAM STRAIN RELIEFS AND SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR MAKING THE SAME

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This can relate to cable structures and, more particularly, to cable structures with localized foam strain reliefs and systems and methods for making the same.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

A conventional cable structure used for data and/or power signal transmission typically includes at least one conductor extending along a length of the cable structure and a cover surrounding the conductor along at least a portion of the length of the cable structure. Often times, a strain relief component is positioned over a portion of the cover or adjacent to an end of the cover to dampen strains on the cable structure. However, such a strain relief component is often too large and/or too visually distinct from the remainder of the cable structure for desired cosmetic properties of the cable structure. Accordingly, alternative strain reliefs for cable structures are needed.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

Cable structures with localized foam strain reliefs and systems and methods for making the same are provided. Each localized foam strain relief may be incorporated into or positioned underneath a cover of the cable structure, which may provide a seamless look and feel to the cable structure.

For example, in some embodiments, there is provided a method for forming a cable structure that may include disposing an extrudable material in a processing space of a system, where the extrudable material may include a base material and a foam material. The method may also include extruding the extrudable material through a die of the system and, during the extruding, changing a relationship between the base material and the foam material in the extrudable material.

In other embodiments, there is provided a cable structure that may include a conductor arrangement extending along a length of the cable structure and a cover surrounding the conductor arrangement along the length of the cable structure, where the density of the cover may vary along the length of the cable structure.

In yet other embodiments, there is provided a cable structure that may include a conductor arrangement extending along a longitudinal axis of a length of the cable structure and a cover disposed about the conductor arrangement along the longitudinal axis. At a first cross-section of the cable structure that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the cover may include a first amount of foam. At a second cross-section of the cable structure that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the cover may include a second amount of foam that is less than the first amount of foam.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other aspects of the invention, its nature, and various features will become more apparent upon consideration of the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters may refer to like parts throughout, and in which:

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of an illustrative assembly that includes at least one cable structure with a localized foam strain relief, in accordance with some embodiments of the invention;

FIG. **1**A is a cross-sectional view of a portion of a cable structure of FIG. **1**, taken from line IA-IA of FIG. **1**, in accordance with some embodiments of the invention;

FIG. **1**B is a cross-sectional view of the cable structure of FIGS. **1** and **1**A, taken from line IB-IB of FIG. **1**A, in accordance with some embodiments of the invention;

FIG. **2** is a cross-sectional view of an illustrative system that may be used to manufacture at least a portion of the cable structure of FIGS. **1-1**B, in accordance with some embodiments of the invention;

FIG. **3** is a graph showing illustrative characteristics of a process for manufacturing at least a portion of the cable structure of FIGS. **1-1**B using the system of FIG. **2**, in accordance with some embodiments of the invention;

FIG. **4** is a cross-sectional view, similar to FIG. **1**B, of a single structure that may be used to provide at least the cable structure of FIGS. **1-1**B, in accordance with some embodiments of the invention; and

FIG. **5** is a flowchart of an illustrative process for manufacturing a cable structure, in accordance with various embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DISCLOSURE

Cable structures with localized foam strain reliefs and systems and methods for making the same are provided and described with reference to FIGS. **1-5**.

A cable structure can include at least one localized foam strain relief incorporated into or positioned underneath a cover of the cable structure. Such a localized foam strain relief may be provided along any suitable portion of the length of the cover and may be any suitable size and shape that may differ from but that may seamlessly integrate with an adjacent portion of the cover. For example, the ratio of base material to foam material may be varied during the manufacture of a cable structure cover, such that distinct portions of the cover may include more foam than other portions of the cover. This may provide localized strain relief properties to the cable structure while also obviating the need for additional strain relief components to be provided adjacent to or over specific portions of the cover. Varying the amount of foam material used to form a cable structure cover during a single manufacture process may enable the cover to have a seamless look and feel while also reducing the number of manufacture processes required to create the cable structure.

A cable structure including at least one localized foam strain relief may be provided as part of any suitable cabled assembly. For example, as shown in FIG. **1**, a cabled headset assembly **100** may include a cable **110** that can electrically couple two or more non-cable components of assembly **100** (e.g., cable **110** may electrically couple an audio connector **120** to a left speaker **130** and/or a right speaker **140** of assembly **100**). Cable **110** may include a main cable structure **112** that may extend between audio connector **120** and a bifurcation cable structure (e.g., forked structure) **114** of cable **110**. Cable **110** may also include a left cable structure **116** that may extend between bifurcation cable structure **114** and left speaker **130**. Alternatively or additionally, cable **110** may include a right cable structure **118** that may extend between bifurcation cable structure **114** and right speaker **140**.

A conductor arrangement including one or more conductors may extend through each one of cable structures **112**, **114**, **116**, and **118**, and may be configured to transmit data and/or power signals between audio connector **120**, left speaker **130**, and right speaker **140**. Moreover, each one of cable structures **112**, **114**, **116**, and **118** may include a cover that may surround its conductor arrangement along at least a portion of the length of the cable structure. For example, as shown in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, main cable structure **112** may include a conductor arrangement **102** extending along a length of main cable structure **112** (e.g., along a longitudinal axis A of main cable structure **112**) and a cover **104** that may surround conductor arrangement **102** along at least a portion of the length of main cable structure **112** (e.g., along longitudinal axis A). Such a cover may provide protection for its conductor arrangement (e.g., insulation or shielding) and may, in some embodiments, provide an outer surface of its cable structure. In other embodiments, an additional element may be positioned about the outer surface of the cover for providing the outermost surface of a cable structure.

Any one or more of cable structures **112**, **114**, **116**, and **118** may include at least one localized foam region, which may provide strain relief to dampen strains on cable **110**. In some embodiments, such a foam region may be incorporated into a cover of the cable structure. In other embodiments, such a foam region may be incorporated in between a cover of the cable structure and a conductor arrangement of the cable structure. Such a foam region may include one or more cells or voids (e.g., pockets of gas) formed within a base material of the cover, whereby the foam region may use less base material for a given volume than a non-foam region of the cover. Thus, in some embodiments, a foam region may reduce the density, weight, and/or cost of material for that region of the cover, while also increasing the elongation, tensility, and/or any other suitable strain relief capability for that region of the cover, thereby better enabling the cable structure to withstand bend stresses.

For example, as shown in FIG. **1**, main cable structure **112** may include a first foam region **111** at an end portion of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** that is adjacent to audio connector **120**. Additionally or alternatively, as shown in FIGS. **1**-**1**B, cover **104** of main cable structure **112** may include a second foam region **113** along a middle portion of the length of main cable structure **112** between a first non-foam region **103** and a second non-foam region **105** of main cable structure **112**, and a third foam region **115** along a middle portion of the length of main cable structure **112** between second non-foam region **105** and a third non-foam region **107** of main cable structure **112**. Moreover, as also shown in FIG. **1**, bifurcation cable structure **114** may include a foam region **117** along a middle portion of the length of bifurcation cable structure **114** between main cable structure **112** and left cable structure **116**, while left cable structure **116** may include a foam region **119** at an end portion of left cable structure **116** that is adjacent to left speaker **130**, and while right cable structure **118** may include a foam region **121** at an end of right cable structure **118** that is adjacent to bifurcation cable structure **114**.

In some embodiments, it may be desirable for at least a portion of each cable structure of a cable (e.g., cable structures **112**, **114**, **116**, and **118** of cable **110**) to have as small a diameter or cross-section as possible (e.g., for aesthetic reasons). As a result, the diameter or cross-sectional size of a non-foam region (e.g., a non-strain relief region) of a cable structure may be smaller than the diameter or cross-sectional size of one or more foam regions of the cable structure. For example, as shown in FIGS. **1**-**1**B, a diameter d1 of non-foam region **103** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** may be smaller than a diameter D1 of adjacent foam region **113** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112**. In some embodiments, it may be desirable for each cable structure of a cable to seamlessly integrate with an adjacent cable structure or with an adjacent non-cable component (e.g., for aesthetic reasons). As a result, the diameter or cross-sectional size of a foam region of a cable structure may vary from the diameter of an adjacent non-foam region of the cable structure to the diameter of an adjacent cable structure or to the diameter of an adjacent non-cable component. For example, as shown in FIG. **1**, a diameter of foam region **111** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** may change or otherwise transition from a diameter D0, which may be equal to the diameter of an adjacent portion of audio connector **120**, to diameter d1, which may be equal to the diameter of adjacent non-foam region **103** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112**. As another example, as also shown in FIG. **1**, a diameter of foam region **119** of left cable structure **116** may change or otherwise transition from a first diameter d2, which may be equal to the diameter of an adjacent non-foam region **109** of left cable structure **116**, to a second diameter D2, which may be equal to the diameter of an adjacent portion of left speaker **130**. Such a diameter changing transition of a foam region of a cable structure may take any suitable shape, such as any suitable shape that may exhibit a fluid or smooth transition. For example, the shape of the transition of a foam region can be similar to that of a cone or a neck of a wine bottle. As another example, the shape of the transition of a foam region can be stepless (i.e., there may be no abrupt or dramatic step change in diameter, or no sharp angle at an end of the transition). In some embodiments, the diameter changing transition of a foam region may be mathematically represented by a bump function, which may require the entire diameter changing transition to be stepless and smooth (e.g., the bump function may be continuously differentiable).

As a foam region may increase the diameter or cross-sectional size of a portion of a cable structure, strain relief may be realized for that cable structure due to the extra girth provided by the foam region. Moreover, such a larger dimension of a foam region compared to another portion of a cable structure (e.g., an adjacent non-foam region) may enable a more secure connection (e.g., via an adhesive or any other suitable connection mechanism) between that cable structure and an adjacent component (e.g., an adjacent cable structure or an adjacent non-cable component). For example, as shown in FIG. **1**, the connection between left speaker **130** and the larger diameter D2 of foam region **119** of left cable structure **116** may be more robust and more secure than if foam region **119** did not exist and instead left speaker **130** were connected to left cable structure **116** at smaller diameter d2 of non-foam region **109**. Alternatively, the diameter or cross-sectional size of a non-foam region (e.g., a non-strain relief region) of a cable structure may be smaller than or the same size as the diameter or cross-sectional size of one or more foam regions of the cable structure. For example, as also shown in FIGS. **1**-**1**B, diameter d1 may be shared by non-foam region **105**, foam region **115**, and non-foam region **107** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112**. As mentioned, a foam region of a cover of a cable structure may have a lower density than a non-foam region of the cover (e.g., whether the diameter of the foam region is larger than, smaller than, or equal to the diameter of the non-foam region), which may increase the elongation, tensility, and/or any other suitable strain relief capability of the foam region, thereby better enabling the cable structure to withstand bend stresses.

A cable structure including at least one localized foam strain relief (e.g., any one of cable structures **112**, **114**, **116**, and **118** of FIG. **1**) can be constructed using any suitable manufacturing process or combination of manufacturing processes. For example, in some embodiments, a cable structure including at least one localized foam strain relief can be at least partially constructed via an extrusion process, and such an extrusion process may include one or more controllable system factors for adjusting one or more characteristics of a localized foam strain relief.

FIG. **2** is a cross-sectional view of an illustrative extruder system **200**. Extruder system **200** can receive any suitable base material or combination of base materials to be extruded in a first form, such as pellets, and can transform the base material or combination of base materials to a form corresponding to at least a portion of a cover of one or more of cable structures **112**, **114**, **116**, and **118** of FIG. **1** (e.g., cover **104** of FIGS. **1**-**1**B). For example, extruder system **200** can use any suitable base material **203**, which may include, but is not limited to, polyethylene, polypropylene, acetal, acrylic, polyamide (e.g., nylon), polystyrene, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene ("ABS"), any thermoplastic elastomer ("TPE"), fluoropolymer, polycarbonate, and any suitable combination thereof. Such base material **203** may be provided to extruder system **200** via a hopper **210** for processing in any suitable form including, for example, in liquid or solid form (e.g., pellets or chips of base material **203** can be provided within hopper **210**). A feedthroat **212** of hopper **210** may control the passing of base material **203** from hopper **210** into a cavity **221** of barrel **220** for processing. A screw **222** or any other suitable mechanism can be positioned within cavity **221** of barrel **220** and may be configured to rotate or otherwise move within cavity **221** (e.g., at the direction of a drive motor **228**) to direct base material **203** from a hopper end **224** of barrel **220** to a die end **226** of barrel **220** (e.g., in the direction of arrow **211**). Drive motor **228** can drive screw **222** at any suitable rate, speed, and/or any other suitable movement characteristic, including a variable speed.

Extruder system **200** may be provided with one or more thermal components **214** along one or more portions of barrel **220**. Each thermal component **214** may be configured to heat barrel **220** to any desired melt temperature, which may melt at least a portion of base material **203** passing through cavity **221**. For example, barrel **220** can be heated to a temperature in the range of 200° Celsius to 300° Celsius (e.g., 250° Celsius), although the particular temperature can be selected based on each base material **203** used. As base material **203** passes through cavity **221** of barrel **220**, pressure and friction created by screw **222** and/or heat applied to barrel **220** by thermal component **214** can cause the material to melt and flow. The resulting material can be substantially liquid in a region near die end **226** of barrel **220** so that it may easily flow into a die **250** (e.g., via a screen subassembly **230** and/or via a feedpipe **240**). In some embodiments, different amounts of heat can be applied to different sections of barrel **220** to create a variable heat profile. For example, the amount of heat provided to barrel **220** can increase from hopper end **224** to die end **226**. By gradually increasing the temperature of barrel **220** from hopper end **224** to die end **226**, base material **203** deposited in cavity **221** of barrel **220** can gradually heat up and melt as it is pushed toward die end **226** in the direction of arrow **211**. This may reduce the risk of overheating, which may cause base material **203** to degrade. In some embodiments, one or more thermal components **214** of extruder system **200** may be configured to cool barrel **220** for controlling a temperature profile of barrel **220**. For example, thermal component **214** may include a heating component (e.g., electrical heaters) and a cooling component (e.g., a fan). Each thermal component **214** may be configured to operate differently at different locations along barrel **220** (e.g., to heat barrel **220** at one or more locations, and to cool barrel **220** at one or more different locations). Any number of thermal components **214** can be provided along barrel **220** and/or along any other portion of system **200** (e.g., along a portion of feedpipe **240** and/or die **250** and/or treatment module **260** (not shown)).

Screw **222** can have any suitable channel depth and/or screw angle for directing material within cavity **221** towards die **250**. In some embodiments, screw **222** can define several zones, each of which may be designed to have different effects on the material within cavity **221**. For example, screw **222** can include a feed zone adjacent to hopper **210** that may be operative to carry solid material pellets of base material **203** to an adjacent melting zone where the solid material may melt. The channel depth of screw **222** can progressively increase in such a melting zone. Following such a melting zone, a metering zone can be used to melt the last particles of the material and mix the material to a uniform temperature and composition. In some embodiments, screw **222** can also include a decompression zone in which the channel depth may increase to relieve pressure within the screw and allow trapped gases (e.g., moisture or air) to be drawn out of cavity **221** (e.g., by a vacuum **215**). In such embodiments, screw **222** may also include a second metering zone having a lower channel depth to re-pressurize the fluid material and direct it further towards die **250** in the direction of arrow **211** (e.g., at a constant and predictable rate).

When fluid material reaches die end **226** of barrel **220**, the material can be expelled from barrel **220** and can pass through screen subassembly **230**, which may include one or more screens, each of which may include one or more openings that may be sized to allow the material to flow therethrough (e.g., in the direction of arrow **211**) but that may also be sized to prevent contaminants from passing therethrough. Screen subassembly **230** can be reinforced by a breaker plate that may be used to resist the pressure of the material as it is pushed towards die **250** by screw **222**. In some embodiments, screen subassembly **230**, with or without such a breaker plate, may be configured to provide back pressure to barrel **220** so that the material can melt and mix uniformly within cavity **221** of barrel **220**. The amount of pressure provided can be adjusted by changing the number of screens of screen subassembly **230**, by changing the relative positions of the screens of screen subassembly **230** (e.g., through mis-aligning openings in stacked screens), by changing the size of openings in each screen of screen subassembly **230**, and/or by changing any other suitable characteristic of screen subassembly **230**.

The material passing through screen subassembly **230** may be directed through feedpipe **240** towards die **250**. Feedpipe **240** can define an elongated feedpipe volume **241** through which material can flow. Unlike within cavity **221** of barrel **220**, in which material may rotate, material passing through feedpipe volume **241** of feedpipe **240** can travel along the axis of feedpipe **240** (e.g., along the direction of arrow **211**) with little or no rotation. This can ensure that when the material reaches die **250**, there may be no built-in rotational stresses or strains that may adversely affect the resulting cable structure (e.g., stresses that may cause warping upon cooling).

Fluid material passing through volume **241** of feedpipe **240** can reach die **250**, where the material may be given an initial profile, which may or may not correspond to the final profile of the cover of the cable structure. Material can pass from volume **241** of feedpipe **240** into at least one die opening **254** of die **250** and around at least one pin **252** that may be positioned within die opening **254**. Each one of pin **252** and opening **254** can have any suitable shape including, for example, a circular shape, curved shape, polygonal shape, or any arbitrary shape. In some embodiments, at least one pin **252** can be movable within opening **254** of die **250**, for example, such that the size or shape of at least one die opening **254** can be varied (e.g., during the extrusion process for a particular cable structure). Such movement of elements within die **250** may be controllable for adjusting a characteristic of the material passed out of die opening **254** (i.e., in the direction of arrow **211**), such as a cross-sectional geometry.

In some embodiments, a hypodermal path (not shown) may be provided to extend through die pin **252** (e.g., through a centerline of pin **252**) or any other suitable element of system **200**, such that a conductor arrangement (e.g., conductor arrangement **102**) may be fed through the hypodermal path (e.g., in the direction of arrow **211**) and into die opening **254**. As a conductor arrangement is fed through such a hypodermal path, material flowing from feedpipe volume **241** of feedpipe **240** through die opening **254** may surround the conductor arrangement as it exits the hypodermal path (e.g., the material may form cover **104** that may surround conductor arrangement **102** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1**A and **1**B). In some alternative embodiments, a rod may instead be fed through such a hypodermal path and material flowing from feedpipe **240** may instead be extruded around such a rod by die **250**. Such a rod can have any suitable dimensions including, for example, a constant or variable cross-section, and may be coated or treated so that it may minimally adhere to the extruded material. Such a rod can be removed from the resulting structure formed by the extrusion process to form a hollow tube through which a conductor arrangement can then be fed.

To ensure that an external surface of the cover of the cable structure created using an extrusion process of extruder system **200** may be smooth and/or that the material may be uniformly distributed around a conductor arrangement, the conductor arrangement may be covered or surrounded along its length by a sheath (not shown) that may maintain a constant fixed and/or smooth outer diameter (e.g., diameter OD of conductor arrangement **102** of FIG. **1**A). Thus, while the outer diameter of the conductor arrangement may remain constant and/or smooth, the diameter of the extruded cover about the conductor arrangement can vary (e.g., from diameter d1 to diameter D1). Otherwise, in the absence of a smooth outer surface, material of a cover extruded over a conductor arrangement may mirror or mimic discontinuities of the outer surface of the conductor arrangement. For example, if the conductor arrangement includes two distinct conductors placed length-wise side by side (e.g., along axis A), the outer surface of the extruded cover may include at least one indentation or discontinuity that reflects the separation between the conductors of such a conductor arrangement.

In any event, once material has passed through die **250**, with or without a rod or conductor arrangement, the resulting structure (e.g., extrudate) may be fed into a treatment volume **261** of at least one treatment module **260**, which may be configured to thermally treat, pressure treat, and/or treat in any other suitable way at least a portion of the extruded material provided by die **250**. For example, at least a portion of the extruded material provided by die **250** may be cooled within treatment volume **261** using any suitable approach, such as, for example, via a liquid bath (e.g., a water bath), air cooling, vacuum cooling, or combinations of these. As another example, at least a portion of the extruded material provided by die **250** may pressurized or de-pressurized within treatment volume **261** (e.g., using a vacuum treatment module **260**). Treatment module **260** may be configured to provide the extruded material with its final profile, which may be the profile of the cover of the cable structure.

In some embodiments, one or more additives can be added to base material **203** within any suitable processing space of system **200** to provide mechanical or finishing attributes to the cover of the cable structure. For example, one or more additives for providing any suitable attribute, such as for providing ultra-violet ("UV") protection, modifying a coefficient of friction of an outer surface of the cover, refining a color of the cable structure, or combinations of these, may be used. The additives can be provided in hopper **210** along with base material **203**. Additionally or alternatively, such additives may be inserted into cavity **221** of barrel **220** at another position along the length of barrel **220** between hopper end **224** and die end **226**. Additionally or alternatively, such additives may be inserted into feedpipe volume **241** of feedpipe **240**, into die opening **254** of die **250**, and/or into treatment volume **261** of treatment module **260**. The amount of any additives that may be added and the particular position at which any additives may be added can be selected based on any attributes of base material **203**. For example, additives can be added when base material **203** reaches a particular fluidity to ensure that the additives can mix with base material **203**.

A foam material may be incorporated into an extrusion process of extruder system **200**, which may provide one or more foam regions along the length of a cover of a cable structure (e.g., foam region **113** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1**-**1**B). For example, as shown in FIG. **2**, extruder system **200** may use any suitable foaming agent or foam material **273**, including, but not limited to, any suitable blowing agent (e.g., carbon dioxide, nitrogen, one or more hydrocarbons, one or more chlorofluorocarbons, any suitable combination thereof, and the like), which may be a physical blowing agent and/or a chemical blowing agent. For example, a chemical reaction of materials may create a gas and, thus, voids, and/or gas may be physically injected into the material. In some embodiments, foam material **273** may also include one or more suitable base materials (e.g., any suitable base material described above with respect to base material **203**), and/or foam material **273** may be a foaming agent that may be selectively combined with base material **203** from hopper **210** at one or more locations within extruder system **200** during an extruding process.

Foam material **273** may be provided to extruder system **200** via a foam source **270** for processing in any suitable form including, for example, a liquid, solid, and/or gas form. A metering device **272** of foam source **270** may control the passing of foam material **273** from foam source **270** into any suitable processing space of system **200** (e.g., barrel cavity **221**, feedpipe volume **241**, die opening **254**, and/or treatment volume **261**) for further processing by system **200** to at least partially form a foam region along the length of a cover of a cable structure (e.g., foam region **113** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1-1**B). For example, in some embodiments, metering device **272** of foam source **270** may control the passing of foam material **273** from foam source **270** into cavity **221** of barrel **220**. In such embodiments, screw **222** and thermal component **214** may be appropriately controlled to enable any base material **203** that may be within cavity **221** (e.g., as introduced by feedthroat **212** of hopper **210**) to be mixed or otherwise combined with any foam material **273** that may also be within cavity **221** (e.g., as introduced by metering device **272** of foam source **270**) along a particular portion of system **200**. Foam material **273** may be introduced into cavity **221** at any suitable portion of barrel **220** between ends **224** and **226**. For example, as shown in FIG. **2**, metering device **272** may introduce foam material **273** into cavity **221** proximate die end **226** (e.g., downstream in the direction of arrow **211** from where base material **203** may be introduced into cavity **221** by hopper **210**). In other embodiments, foam material **273** and base material **203** may be configured to be introduced at the same general portion of cavity **221**.

Alternatively or additionally, as shown in FIG. **2**, a metering device **272***a* of a foam source **270***a* may control the passing of a foam material **273***a* from foam source **270***a* into feedpipe volume **241** of feedpipe **240** for further processing by system **200** to at least partially form a foam region along the length of a cover of a cable structure (e.g., foam region **113** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1-1**B). Alternatively or additionally, as also shown in FIG. **2**, a metering device **272***b* of a foam source **270***b* may control the passing of a foam material **273***b* from foam source **270***b* into die opening **254** of die **250** for further processing by system **200** to at least partially form a foam region along the length of a cover of a cable structure (e.g., foam region **113** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1-1**B). Alternatively or additionally, although not shown in FIG. **2**, a metering device may control the passing of a foam material from a foam source into treatment volume **261** of treatment module **260** for further processing by system **200** to at least partially form a foam region along the length of a cover of a cable structure (e.g., foam region **113** of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1-1**B). It is to be understood that, in some embodiments, at least two different sources of material (e.g., base material and/or foam material) may each be fed into a single crosshead of a system, whereby the extrusion of material from each source may be alternated or variably controlled through the crosshead. At least one melt pump may be associated with each source of material for variably controlling or alternating how the crosshead may be fed with material from each source. In some embodiments, a crosshead may form an angle (e.g., 90°) between an axis along which a conductor bundle travels towards a die and an axis along which material is introduced for being extruded about the conductor bundle.

Different foam materials may be introduced into the same or different processing spaces of system **200** (e.g., barrel cavity **221**, feedpipe volume **241**, die opening **254**, and/or treatment volume **261**) for mixing together to help form a foam region of a cover of a cable structure. For example, in some embodiments, different foam materials may be mixed in a single foam source **270** or prior to deposition within a single foam source **270**, such that the different foam materials may be mixed before being introduced into a processing space of system **200**. Alternatively or additionally, different foam materials may be mixed within a processing space of system **200** after being introduced into the same processing space via different foam metering devices or after being introduced into different processing spaces via different foam metering devices. Each foam metering device (e.g., each one of metering devices **272-272***b*) may be configured to control the amount of a foam material or the amount of a combination of foam materials that may be introduced into a processing space of system **200**, which may enable a particular amount of foam material to be maintained at a particular level or to be varied according to desired characteristics of the cable structure being formed. In some embodiments, a foam metering device may meter a mass flow rate of a foam material.

A single-phase solution of a foam material (e.g., foam material **273**) and base material **203** may be formed in a processing space of system **200**, and such a single-phase solution may be nucleated upon being extruded through die **250**. For example, the solution may experience a pressure drop when being extruded through die **250**, which may induce nucleation. Alternatively, a mixture of a foam material and base material **203** may not be a single-phase solution. In some embodiments, a foam material (e.g., one or more of foam materials **273-273***b*) may impregnate a base material (e.g., base material **203**) with compressed nitrogen bubbles or any other suitable foaming agent, and such a mixture may then be treated in treatment module **260** to explode the compressed nitrogen bubbles. For example, a portion or the entirety of an extruded structure that may contain such compressed nitrogen bubbles therein may be positioned within a vacuum chamber treatment module **260** with a negative pressure (e.g., at -10^6 Torr), which may explode at least some of the compressed nitrogen bubbles within the portion of the structure positioned within treatment module **260**. Therefore, selective portions of such impregnated compressed nitrogen bubbles may be exploded for generating one or more foam regions of the extruded structure while other portions of such impregnated compressed nitrogen bubbles (e.g., those portions not treated within treatment module **260**) may not be exploded and may be provided as part of one or more non-foam regions of the extruded structure.

Various system factors relating to the extrusion process of extruder system **200** can be adjusted to change one or more characteristics of the created structure (e.g., for generating a localized foam strain relief region and/or altering one or more of its characteristics). As mentioned, movement of pin **252** within die opening **254** of die **250** during an extrusion process may alter the size and/or shape of the created cable structure. As another example, the speed at which a rod or conductor arrangement may be passed through die **250** can be adjusted to change the diameter of the resulting structure extruded thereabout (e.g., the faster the line speed of the rod or conductor arrangement, the smaller the diameter of the resulting cover of the cable structure thereabout). As another example, the speed at which screw **222** may bring material to die **250** can be adjusted to control the amount of material passing through die **250** in a particular period of time (e.g., the rotational speed of screw **222** may be adjusted via motor **228**). As yet another example, the amount of heat provided to barrel **220** (e.g., via thermal component **214**) may control the viscosity of the material within cavity **221** of barrel **220** and/or the pressure within cavity **221** of barrel **220**. As still another example, the melt pressure of the material within cavity **221** of barrel **220** can be adjusted. As still yet another example, characteristics of treatment module **260** may be adjusted to control one or more reactions within the extruded structure (e.g., to explode impregnated compressed nitrogen bubbles along particular portions of an extruded cable structure). As still yet another example, one or more screens and/or breaker plates of screen subassembly **230** can be adjusted to control the amount of material passing from barrel **220** to die **250**. As more material passes through die **250** in a particular amount of time, the diameter of a resulting structure may be increased. As still yet another example, one or more material characteristics of the particular base material **203** provided within the cable structure, one or more material characteristics of the particular foam material **273** provided within the cable structure, one or more relative ratios of one or more material characteristics between the particular base material **203** provided within the cable structure and the particular foam material **273** provided within the cable structure, and the like may be adjusted to control the material composition of the cable structure along various portions of its length. Specific settings for any one or more of these exemplary system factors of extruder system **200** can be dynamically adjusted during the extrusion process to change one or more characteristics of the created structure (e.g., for generating a localized foam strain relief region and/or altering one or more of its characteristics). Any one or more of these system factors can be adjusted by any suitable component of extruder system **200**, such as, for example, by a control station **280** of system **200** that may be electrically coupled to and control one or more of the other components of system **200** (e.g., one or more of hopper **210**, vacuum **215**, thermal component **214**, motor **228**, screen subassembly **230**, feedpipe **240**, die **250**, treatment module **260**, foam source **270**, foam source **270**_a_, foam source **270**_b_, and the like) via one or more data and/or power buses **281**.

In particular, by dynamically adjusting system factors, extruder system **200** can create a cable structure that may include at least one localized foam strain relief region along a portion of a length of a cover of a cable structure (e.g., foam region **113** along a portion of cover **104** of main cable structure **112** of FIGS. **1**-**1**B), where a transition change between the strain relief region and a non-strain relief region of the cover of the cable structure may be smooth and/or seamless. For example, the transition between a non-foam region and a foam region of a cover (e.g., from non-foam region **105** to foam region **115** of cover **104** of FIGS. **1** and **1**B) may be visually unidentifiable to a user. In some embodiments, one or both of the amount of a characteristic of foam material **273** and the amount of a characteristic of base material **203** provided in a certain portion of a cable structure cover may be varied over the length of the cover (e.g., may be varied amongst adjacent cross-sections of the cover along axis A, such as the cross-section of FIG. **1**A that may be perpendicular to the extrusion process direction for the structure (e.g., the direction of arrow **211** of FIG. **2**)), thereby changing a relationship between base material **203** and foam material **273** along the length of the cover. For example, the amount of a characteristic (e.g., mass) of base material **203** extruded through die opening **254** of die **250** at any moment in time may be constant throughout the length of the cover, while the amount of that characteristic of foam material **273** extruded through die opening **254** of die **250** at any moment in time may be varied according to any suitable shape wave (e.g., a sine wave or any other suitable wave that may mimic the desired outer diameter shape or material characteristic profile of the created cover structure).

As shown by graph **300** of FIG. **3**, for example, the amount of a characteristic (e.g., mass) of base material **203** provided at times T1-T5 as well as after time T6 may be a constant amount Y and at a lower amount Z between times T5 and T6. Moreover, as also shown in FIG. **3**, the amount of that same characteristic (e.g., mass) of foam material **273** provided between times T1 and T2, between times T4 and T5, as well as after time T6 may be a constant amount Z, at a gradually increasing amount between amounts Z and X between times T2 and T3, at a gradually decreasing amount between amounts X and Z between times T3 and T4, and at amount Y between times T5 and T6. In some embodiments, this combination of amounts of base material and foam material may combine to generate at least a portion of cover **104** of FIGS. **1**-**1**B, where non-foam region **103** may be created between times T1 and T2, foam region **113** may be created between times T2 and T4, non-foam region **105** may be created between times T4 and T5, foam region **115** may be created between times T5 and T6, and non-foam region **107** may be created after time T6. The characteristic of graph **300** may be any suitable characteristic, such as mass, density, or any other suitable characteristic. It is to be understood that references to a "non-foam region" (e.g., non-foam region **105** of cover **104** of FIGS. **1** and **1**B) may be any suitable region that may include no foam material or some foam material but less foam material than an adjacent foam region (e.g. non-foam region **105** may include some foam but less foam than adjacent foam region **113** or adjacent foam region **115**). That is, amount Z of FIG. **3** may be some amount greater than zero (e.g., the amount of foam material **273** that may be emitted by foam metering device **272** may be at least a minimum amount such that foam metering device **272** does not have to be turned on and off during a manufacturing process of extruder system **200**). Alternatively, in some embodiments, amount Z may be equal to zero amount of the characteristic.

Therefore, a manufacturing process of system **200** may enable creation of a cable structure that may include at least one foam region (e.g., at least one localized foam region adjacent a non-foam region). Such a foam region may be used as a strain relief for the cable structure, thereby obviating the need for any additional manufacturing processes that may add an additional strain relief component on top of or adjacent an end of the cable structure. Moreover, in some embodiments, a manufacturing process of system **200** may enable creation of multiple cable structures, at least one of which may include at least one foam region (e.g., at least one localized foam region adjacent a non-foam region). For example, a manufacturing process of system **200** may generate a single structure that may later be divided into multiple cable structures. As shown in FIG. **4**, for example, at least a portion of a single structure **400** may be divided into multiple cable structures. Single structure **400** may be formed by a manufacturing process of system **200** similar to that described above with respect to FIG. **1**B and FIG. **3**, but repeated twice (e.g., structure **400** may be similar to the structure of FIG. **1**B created twice consecutively during a single manufacturing process of system **200**), where structure **400** may include a cover **404** about a conductor arrangement **402** along axis A. Then, one or more divisions may be made to structure **400** for creating multiple cable structures (e.g., multiple cable structures of assembly **100** of FIG. **1**). For example, as shown in FIG. **4**, cuts C**1**-C**4** may be made through structure **400**. Cut C**1** may be made where structure **400** has a diameter d2, which may be equal to diameter d1, cut C**2** may be made further along axis A where structure **400** has a diameter D2, which may be less than diameter D1, cut C**3** may be made even further along axis A where structure **400** has a diameter D0, which may be less than diameter D1, and cut C**4** may be made even further along axis A where structure **400** has a diameter d1, such that the resulting portion of structure **400** between cuts C**1** and C**2** may provide left cable structure **116** and such that the resulting portion of structure **400** between cuts C**3** and C**4** may provide main cable structure **112**. Therefore, any number of cable structures may be realized by dividing up a single structure **400** that may have been created by a single manufacturing process of system **200**.

FIG. **5** is a flowchart of an illustrative process **500** for forming a cable structure. At step **502** of process **500**, an extrudable material including a base material and a foam material may be disposed in a processing space of a system. For example, as described with respect to FIG. **2**, a base material **203** and a foam material **273** may be disposed in any suitable processing space of system **200** (e.g., barrel cavity **221**, feedpipe volume **241**, die opening **254**, and/or treatment volume **261**) for further processing by system **200**. Next, at step **504**, the extrudable material may be extruded through a die of the system. For example, a solution of base material **203** and foam material **273** may be extruded through die **250** of system **200**. During the extruding of step **504**, process **500** may also include changing a relationship between the base material and the foam material in the extrudable material at step **506**. For example, as described with respect to FIG. **3**, one or both of the amount of a characteristic of foam material **273** and the amount of a characteristic of base material **203** provided in a certain portion of a cable structure cover may be varied over the length of the cover (e.g., may be varied amongst adjacent cross-sections of the cover along axis A, such as the cross-section of FIG. **1**A that may be perpendicular to the extrusion process direction for the structure (e.g., the direction of arrow **211** of FIG. **2**)), thereby changing a relationship between base material **203** and foam material **273** along the length of the cover.

It is understood that the steps shown in process **500** of FIG. **5** are merely illustrative and that existing steps may be modified or omitted, additional steps may be added, and the order of certain steps may be altered.

While there have been described cable structures with localized foam strain reliefs and systems and methods for making the same, it is to be understood that many changes may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Insubstantial changes from the claimed subject matter as viewed by a person with ordinary skill in the art, now known or later devised, are expressly contemplated as being equivalently within the scope of the claims. Therefore, obvious substitutions now or later known to one with ordinary skill in the art are defined to be within the scope of the defined elements. It is also to be understood that various directional and orientational terms, such as "up and "down," "front" and "back," "top" and "bottom" and "side," "length" and "width" and "thickness" and "diameter" and "cross-section" and "longitudinal," "X-" and "Y-" and "Z-," and the like may be used herein only for convenience, and that no fixed or absolute directional or orientational limitations are intended by the use of these words. For example, the cable structures of this invention can have any desired orientation. If reoriented, different directional or orientational terms may need to be used in their description, but that will not alter their fundamental nature as within the scope and spirit of this invention.

Therefore, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the invention can be practiced by other than the described embodiments, which are presented for purposes of illustration rather than of limitation.

What is claimed is:

1. A cable structure comprising:

a conductor arrangement extending along a length of the cable structure; and

a cover surrounding the conductor arrangement along the length of the cable structure, wherein the cover comprises a single-phase solution, and wherein the density of the single-phase solution of the cover varies along the length of the cable structure.

2. The cable structure of claim **1**, wherein the amount of foam in the single-phase solution of the cover varies along the length of the cable structure.

3. The cable structure of claim **1**, wherein a ratio of base material to foam material within the single-phase solution of the cover varies along the length of the cable structure.

4. The cable structure of claim **1**, wherein:

a first portion of the single-phase solution of the cover surrounding a first portion of the conductor arrangement along a first portion of the length of the cable structure comprises a first amount of foam;

a second portion of the single-phase solution of the cover surrounding a second portion of the conductor arrangement along a second portion of the length of the cable structure comprises a second amount of foam; and

the first amount of foam is greater than the second amount of foam.

5. The cable structure of claim **4**, wherein the diameter of the first portion of the single-phase solution of the cover is greater than the diameter of the second portion of the single-phase solution of the cover.

6. The cable structure of claim **4**, wherein the diameter of the first portion of the single-phase solution of the cover is the same as the diameter of the second portion of the single-phase solution of the cover.

7. The cable structure of claim **4**, wherein the first portion of the single-phase solution of the cover provides strain relief to the cable structure.

8. The cable structure of claim **4**, wherein the first portion of the cable structure is at an end of the cable structure.

9. The cable structure of claim **1**, wherein a portion of the cover provides at least a portion of the outer surface of the cable structure.

10. The cable structure of claim **1**, wherein the entirety of the external surface of the cover is smooth.

11. A cable structure comprising:

a conductor arrangement extending along a longitudinal axis of a length of the cable structure; and

a cover disposed about the conductor arrangement along the longitudinal axis, wherein:

at a first cross-section of the cable structure that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the cover comprises a first amount of foam;

at a second cross-section of the cable structure that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the cover comprises a second amount of foam that is less than the first amount of foam; and

the outer diameter of the cover at the first cross-section is the same as the outer diameter of the cover at the second cross-section.

12. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein the cover at the first cross-section provides a strain relief to the cable structure.

13. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein a portion of the single-phase solution of the cover provides at least a portion of the outer surface of the cable structure.

14. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein the density of the cover at the first cross-section is different than the density of the cover at the second cross-section.

15. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein the cover comprises a single-phase solution, and wherein the density of the single-phase solution of the cover at the first cross-section is different than the density of the single-phase solution of the cover at the second cross-section.

16. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein a ratio of base material to foam material within the cover varies along the longitudinal axis.

17. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein the cover provides at least a portion of the outer surface of the cable structure.

18. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein the cover comprises a single-phase solution, and wherein a portion of the single-phase solution of the cover provides at least a portion of the outer surface of the cable structure.

19. The cable structure of claim **11**, wherein the entirety of the external surface of the cover is smooth.

20. A cable structure comprising:

a conductor arrangement extending along a longitudinal axis of a length of the cable structure; and

a cover disposed about the conductor arrangement along the longitudinal axis, wherein:

the cover comprises a single-phase solution;

at a first cross-section of the cable structure that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the single-phase solution of the cover comprises a particular amount of foam; and

at a second cross-section of the cable structure that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the single-phase solution of the cover comprises less foam than the particular amount of foam.

21. A method for forming a cable structure, the method comprising: disposing an extrudable material in a processing space of a system, wherein the extrudable material comprises a base material and a foam material; extruding the extrudable material through a die of the system; and during the extruding, changing a relationship between the base material and the foam material in the extrudable material; wherein the changing varies a density of the cable structure and, wherein the changing does not vary an outer diameter of the cable structure.

22. The method of claim **21**, wherein the changing creates a strain relief for the cable structure.

23. The method of claim **21**, further comprising feeding a conductor arrangement through the die during the extruding, wherein the extruded material surrounds the conductor arrangement.

24. The method of claim **21**, wherein the base material comprises a thermoplastic elastomer.

25. The method of claim **21**, wherein the foam material comprises at least one of carbon dioxide and nitrogen.

26. The method of claim **21**, further comprising treating a portion of the extruded material to change the density of the portion.

27. The method of claim **21**, further comprising treating a portion of the extruded material, wherein the treating explodes at least some of the foam material of the extruded material of the portion.

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